

THE LINK



The Link is a monthly newsletter published by Delta Dental of New Mexico about the role of dental insurance, and the link between oral health and overall health. Since it includes oral health news, industry news, and Delta Dental updates, it's also our link to you.

Delta Dental contributions noted as New Mexico Health Resources Reports “Best Ever Year”

Jerry Harrison, PhD, the Executive Director of New Mexico Health Resources (NMHR) reports that, “NMHR had the best ever year in FY 2008 – 2009.”

Sixty-nine health care professionals were placed in positions throughout New Mexico, including 35 dentists. Harrison cited the large number of dentists placed, noting that NMHR’s previous largest number of dentist placements was 15 in a single year. This increase reflects the collaborative efforts of over a decade of work on the part of many individuals and organizations, including the members of Governor Richardson’s Oral Health Council. Delta Dental of New Mexico President, Walt Bolic, served on this committee for several years.

Other efforts have contributed to the success of the program to bring more dentists to New Mexico. Harrison noted that, among other programs, the Pre-Dental Program at UNM and the program funded by Delta Dental of New Mexico at NMSU, have provided a basis for the State to become better at making oral health careers attractive to New Mexico students. The New Mexico Higher Education Department offers funding to just over 40 students per year now and there are perhaps as many as 20 more New Mexico students annually admitted to Dental Schools who do not receive financial support.

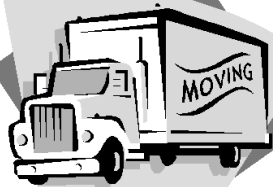
“Of particular note,” Harrison states, “is that over two-thirds of the dentists accepting new positions did so in rural and small communities outside of Albuquerque, at community health centers, Indian Health Service facilities and in private practices.”

New Mexico Health Resources, Inc., is a private, non-profit agency organized to support efforts to recruit and retain healthcare personnel in New Mexico. Founded in 1981, as a result of priorities established during the First Governor's Conference on Rural Health Services, NMHR is governed by a statewide Board of Directors representing a wide range of different healthcare professions, healthcare training programs, healthcare organizations, and healthcare consumers.

Tip of the Month for Group Plan Administrators

Do you have an employee who has changed addresses? Don't forget to tell Delta Dental!

In July, over 50,000 dental benefit handbooks were mailed to Delta Dental Subscribers and hundreds of Explanations of Benefits are mailed each day. Make sure your employees get all the important information they need to understand and appreciate the benefits your company is providing — help us keep addresses current.



Plan Administrators who use Benefit Manager Toolkit (BMT) can make these changes online at the same time the company's personnel records are being updated.

Plan Administrators not using BMT or electronic eligibility file submissions should send Delta Dental the updated information on the Enrollment/Change form, which is also used for changes.

Dental Care: Why does it belong in the health care reform debate?

Why is oral health so important?

Oral health means much more than healthy teeth and a nice smile. It is essential to general health and well-being. Poor oral health and untreated oral diseases can adversely affect the most basic human needs, including the ability to maintain proper nutrition, communicate, attend school or go to work.

Claims Tip of the Month

Almost 90% of all claims are processed by Delta Dental of New Mexico within 7 calendar days! To check on the status of any claim, just click on the Subscriber/Consumer Toolkit link in the Subscribers Section at deltadentalNM.com.



In addition to viewing a particular claim, you can also check on the status of your benefit year deductible and see how much of your plan maximum is left. If it has been over 10 days since you saw the dentist and you have not received an Explanation of Benefits from Delta Dental, or cannot find a record of your claim under the Toolkit, call a Benefit Services Representative to determine if your claim has been submitted.

Benefit Services is available Monday through Friday from 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM at (505) 855-7111 or, if calling from outside Albuquerque, toll free at (877) 395-9420.

Teeth Talk

Coming Soon: Online Dental Risk Assessment

To better educate enrollees of the risk factors that lead to dental disease, Delta Dental has developed an **online interactive risk assessment tool**. Whole mouth health is closely linked to whole body health. Because of this, there are many factors that can contribute to the development of dental disease in you or your child. This quick assessment will examine common risk indicators and provide custom feedback to help you maintain a healthy smile.

This tool will be available on deltadentalNM.com on August 17. In any section of the website, click on the "Oral Health" link to access this online tool.

Furthermore, emerging science points to important associations between periodontal disease, an infection related to several debilitating and expensive-to-treat medical conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis, HIV and the risk of pre-term birth. The correlation between oral health and overall health is the fundamental message of the Surgeon General's Report *Oral Health in America* (May 2000), in which dental disease is likened to a "silent epidemic."

Why should dental health be addressed by health care reform?

Today, more than 130 million Americans lack dental benefit coverage, a population that is nearly half as likely to visit a dentist at least once annually as those with coverage. Having coverage is a major determinant as to whether individuals receive basic preventive services and early, less-expensive treatment.

While the nation's oral health is historically the best it has ever been, the Surgeon General's report states that "profound and consequential" disparities still exist for poor children, the elderly and minorities. Uninsured children, for example, are three times more likely to have untreated dental disease than those with public or private coverage; one-fourth of poor children have not seen a dentist before entering kindergarten. Dental disease rates nearly double by age 65. More than one-fourth of the elderly, many of whom lose their dental coverage when they retire, experience periodontal disease, which is manifested by the loss of connective tissue and bone that supports teeth.

For these reasons and more, any effort to improve access to healthcare for the uninsured and under-insured should also establish greater access to affordable dental care.